

The Light in the Clearing

A TALE of the NORTH COUNTRY in the TIME of SILAS WRIGHT

By IRVING BACHELLER

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BARTON LEARNS OF THE EXISTENCE OF A WONDERFUL POWER KNOWN AS "MONEY."

Synopsis.—Barton Baynes, an orphan, goes to live with his uncle, Peabody Baynes, and his Aunt Deel on a farm on Rattleroad, in a neighborhood called Lickitysplit, about the year 1826. He meets Sally Dunkelberg, about his own age, but socially of a class above the Bayneses, and is fascinated by her pretty face and fine clothes. Barton also meets Roving Kate, known in the neighborhood as the "Silent Woman." Amos Grimshaw, a young son of the richest man in the township, is a visitor at the Baynes home and Roving Kate tells the boys' fortunes, predicting a bright future for Barton and death on the gallows for Amos. Reproved for an act of boyish mischief, Barton runs away, intending to make his home with the Dunkelbergs. He reaches Canton and falls asleep on a porch. There he is found by Silas Wright, Jr., a man prominent in public affairs, who, knowing Peabody Baynes, takes Barton home after buying him new clothes. Silas Wright evinces much interest in Barton and sends a box of books and magazines to the Baynes home. A short time later the election of Mr. Wright to the United States senate is announced.

CHAPTER V.

The Great Stranger

Some strangers came along the road those days—hunters, peddlers and the like—and their coming filled me with a joy which mostly went away with them, I regret to say. None of these, however, appealed to my imagination as did old Kate. But there was one stranger greater than she—greater indeed, than any other who came into Rattleroad. He came rarely and would not be long detained. How curiously we looked at him, knowing his fame and power! This great stranger was Money.

I shall never forget the day that my uncle showed me a dollar bill and a little shiny, gold coin and three pieces of silver, nor can I forget how carefully he watched them while they lay in my hands and presently put them back into his wallet. That was long before the time of which I am writing. I remember hearing him say, one day of that year, when I asked him to take us to the Caravan of Wild Beasts which was coming to the village:

"I'm sorry, but it's been a hundred Sundays since I had a dollar in my wallet for more than ten minutes."

I have his old account book for the years of 1837 and 1838. Here are some of the entries:

"Balanced accounts with J. Dorothy and gave him my note for \$2.15 to be paid in salts January 1, 1838. Sold ten bushels of wheat to E. Miner at 90 cents, to be paid in goods."

"Sold two sheep to Flavius Curtis and took his note for \$6, payable in boots on or before March the first."

Only one entry in more than a hundred mention money, and this was the sum of eleven cents received in balance from a neighbor.

So it will be seen that a spirit of mutual accommodation served to help us over the rough going. Mr. Grimshaw, however, demanded his pay in cash and that I find was mainly the habit of the money-lenders.

We were poor but our poverty was not like that of these days in which I am writing. It was proud and cleanly and well-fed. Our fathers had seen heroic service in the wars and we knew it.

I was twelve years old when I began to be the reader for our little family. Aunt Deel had long complained that she couldn't keep up with her knitting and read so much. We had not seen Mr. Wright for nearly two years, but he had sent us the novels of Sir Walter Scott and I had led them heart deep into the creed battles of Old Mortality.

Then came the evil days of 1837, when the story of our lives began to quicken its pace and excite our interest in its coming chapters. It gave us enough to think of, God knows.

Wild speculations in land and the American paper-money system had brought us into rough going. The banks of the city of New York had suspended payment of their notes. They could no longer meet their engagements. As usual, the burden fell heaviest on the poor. It was hard to get money even for black salts.

Uncle Peabody had been silent and depressed for a month or more. He had signed a note for Rodney Barnes, a cousin, long before and was afraid that he would have to pay it. I didn't know what a note was and I remember that one night, when I lay thinking about it, I decided that it must be something in the nature of horse colic. My uncle told me that a note was a trouble which attacked the brain instead of the stomach.

One autumn day in Canton Uncle Peabody traded three sheep and two-

ty bushels of wheat for a cook stove and brought it home in the big wagon. Rodney Barnes came with him to help set up the stove. He was a big giant of a man with the longest nose in the township. I have often wondered how any one would solve the problem of kissing Mr. Barnes in the immediate region of his nose, the same being in the nature of a defense.

That evening I was chiefly interested in the stove. What a joy it was to me with its damper and griddles and high oven and the shiny edge on its hearth! It rivaled, in its novelty and charm, any tin peddler's cart that ever came to our door. John Axtell and his wife, who had seen it pass their house, hurried over for a look at it. Every hand was on the stove as we tenderly carried it into the house, piece by piece, and set it up. Then they cut a hole in the upper floor and the stone chimney and fitted the pipe. How keenly we watched the building of the fire. How quickly it roared and began to heat the room!

When the Axtells had gone away Aunt Deel said:

"It's grand! It is sartin—but I'm 'fraid we can't afford it—ayes I be!"

"We can't afford to freeze any longer. I made up my mind that we couldn't go through another winter as we have," was my uncle's answer.

"How much did it cost?" she asked.

"Not much different from thirty-four dollars in sheep and grain," he answered.

Rodney Barnes stayed to supper and spent a part of the evening with us.

Like other settlers there, Mr. Barnes was a cheerful optimist. Everything looked good to him until it turned out badly.

He told how he had heard that it was a growing country near the great water highway of the St. Lawrence. Prosperous towns were building up in it. There were going to be great cities in Northern New York. There were rich stores of lead and iron in the rocks. Mr. Barnes had bought two hundred acres at ten dollars an acre. He had to pay a fee of five per cent. to Grimshaw's lawyer for the survey and the papers. This left him owing fourteen hundred dollars on his farm—much more than it was worth.

Our cousin twisted the poker in his great hands until it squeaked as he stood before my uncle and said:

"My wife and I have chopped and burnt and pried and hauled rocks an' shoveled dung an' milked an' churned until we are worn out. For almost twenty years we've been workin' days an' nights an' Sundays. My mortgage was over-due. I owed six hundred dollars on it. I thought it all over one day an' went up to Grimshaw's an' took him by the back of the neck and shook him. He said he would drive me out o' the country. He gave me six months to pay up. I had to pay or lose the land. I got the money on the note that you signed over in Potsdam. Nobody in Canton would 'a' dared to lend it to me."

"Why?" my uncle asked.

"'Fraid o' Grimshaw. He didn't want me to be able to pay it. The place is worth more than six hundred dollars now—that's the reason. I intended to cut some timber an' haul it to the village this winter so I could pay a part o' the note an' git more time as I told ye, but the roads have been so bad I couldn't do any haulin'."

My uncle went and took a drink at the water pail. I saw by his face that he was unusually wrought up.

"My heavens an' earth!" he exclaimed as he sat down again.

"It's the brain colic," I said to myself as I looked at him.

Mr. Barnes seemed to have it also.

"Too much note," I whispered.

"I'm awful sorry, but I've done everything I could," said Mr. Barnes.

"Ain't there somebody that'll take another mortgage?—it ought to be safe now," my uncle suggested.

"Money is so tight it can't be done. The bank has got all the money an' Grimshaw owns the bank. I've tried and tried, but I'll make you safe. I'll give you a mortgage until I can turn 'round."

"How much do you owe on this place?" Barnes asked.

"Seven hundred an' fifty dollars," said my uncle.

"Is it due?"

"It's been due a year an' if I have to pay that note I'll be short my interest."

"God o' Israel! I'm scairt," said Uncle Peabody.

Down crashed the stick of wood into the box.

"What about?"

"It would be like him to put the screws on you now. You've got between him an' his prey. You've taken the mouse away from the cat."

I remember the little panic that fell on us then. I could see tears in the eyes of Aunt Deel as she sat with her head leaning wearily on her hand.

"If he does I'll do all I can," said Barnes, "whatever I've got will be yours."

Rodney Barnes left us, and I remember how Uncle Peabody stood in the middle of the floor and whistled the merriest tune he knew.

"Stand right up here," he called in his most cheerful tone. "Stand right up here before me, both o' ye."

I got Aunt Deel by the hand and led her toward my uncle. We stood facing him. "Stand straighter," he demanded. "Now, altogether. One, two, three, ready—sing."

He beat time with his hand in imitation of the singing master at the schoolhouse and we joined him in singing an old tune which began: "Oh, keep my heart from sadness, God."

This irresistible spirit of the man bridged a bad hour and got us off to bed in fairly good condition.

A few days later the note came due and its owner insisted upon full payment. There was such a clamor for money those days! I remember that my aunt had sixty dollars which she had saved, little by little, by selling eggs and chickens. She had planned to use it to buy a tombstone for her mother and father—a long-cherished ambition. My uncle needed the most of it to help pay the note. We drove to Potsdam on that sad errand and what a time we had getting there and back in deep mud and sand and jolting over corduroys!

"Bart," my uncle said the next evening, as I took down the book to read, "I guess we'd better talk things over a little tonight. These are hard times. If we can find anybody with money enough to buy 'em I dunno but we better sell the sheep."

"If you hadn't been a fool," my aunt exclaimed with a look of great distress—"ayes! if you hadn't been a fool!"

"I'm just what I be, an' I ain't so oig a fool that I need to be reminded of it," said my uncle.

"I'll stay home an' work," I proposed bravely.

"You ain't old enough for that," sighed Aunt Deel.

"I want to keep you in school," said Uncle Peabody, who sat making a splint broom.

While we were talking in walked Benjamin Grimshaw—the rich man of the hills. He didn't stop to knock, but walked right in as if the house were his own. It was common gossip that he held a mortgage on every acre of the countryside. I had never liked him, for he was a stern-eyed man who was always scolding somebody, and I had not forgotten what his son had said of him.

"Good night!" he exclaimed curtly, as he sat down and set his cane between his feet and rested his hands upon it. He spoke hoarsely and I remember the curious notion came to me that he looked like our old ram. He wore a thin, gray beard, under his chin. His mouth was shut tight in a long line curving downward a little at the ends. My uncle used to say that his mouth was made to keep his thoughts from leaking and going to waste. He had a big body, a big chin, a big mouth, a big nose and big ears and hands. His eyes lay small in this setting of bigness.

"Why, Mr. Grimshaw, it's years since you've been in our house—ayes!" said Aunt Deel.

"I suppose it is," he answered rather sharply. "I don't have much time to get around. I have to work. There's some people seem to be able to git along without it. I see you've got one o' these newfangled stoves," he added as he looked it over. "Huh! Rich folks can have anything they want."

Uncle Peabody had sat splintering the long stick of yellow birch. I observed that the jackknife trembled in his hand. His tone had a touch of unnaturalness, proceeding no doubt from his fear of the man before him, as he said:

"When I bought that stove I felt richer than I do now. I had almost enough to settle with you up to date, but I signed a note for a friend and had to pay it."

"Ayuh! I suppose so," Grimshaw answered in a tone of bitter irony which cut me like a knife-blade, young as I was. "What business have you signin' notes an' givin' away money which ain't yours to give—I'd like to know? What business have you actin' like a rich man when you can't pay yer honest debts? I'd like to know that, too?"

"If I've ever acted like a rich man it's been when I wa'n't lookin'," said Uncle Peabody.

"What business have you to go enlargin' yer family—takin' another mouth to feed and another body to spin for? That costs money. I want to tell you one thing, Baynes, you've got to pay up or git out o' here."

He raised his cane and shook it in the air as he spoke.

"Oh, I ain't no doubt o' that," said Uncle Peabody. "You'll have to have yer money—that's sure; an' you will have it if I live, every cent of it. This boy is goin' to be a great help to me—you don't know what a good boy he is and what a comfort he's been to us!"

These words of my beloved uncle uncovered my emotions so that I put my elbow on the wood-box and leaned my head upon it and sobbed.

"I ain't goin' to be hard on ye, Baynes," said Mr. Grimshaw as he rose from his chair; "I'll give ye three months to see what you can do. I wouldn't wonder if the boy would turn out all right. He's big an' cordy of his age and a purty likely boy, they tell me."

Mr. Grimshaw opened the door and stood for a moment looking at us and added in a milder tone: "You've got one o' the best farms in this town an' if ye work hard an' use common sense ye ought to be out o' debt in five years—mebbe less."

He closed the door and went away.

Neither of us moved or spoke as we listened to his footsteps on the gravel path that went down to the road and to the sound of his buggy as he drove away. Then Uncle Peabody broke the silence by saying:

"He's the dam'd'est—"

He stopped, set the half-splintered stick aside, closed his jackknife and went to the water-pail to cool his emotions with a drink.

Aunt Deel took up the subject where he had dropped it, as if no-half-expressed sentiment would satisfy her, saying:

"—old skindint that ever lived in this world, ayes! I ain't goin' to hold my opinion o' that man no longer, ayes! I can't. It's too powerful—ayes!"

Having recovered my composure I repeated that I should like to give up school and stay at home and work.

Aunt Deel interrupted me by saying:

"I have an idee that Silas Wright will help us—ayes! He's comin' home an' you better go down an' see him—ayes! Hadn't ye?"

"Bart an' I'll go down to-morrow," said Uncle Peabody.

Some fourteen months before that day my uncle had taken me to Potsdam and traded grain and salts for what he called a "rip roarin' fine suit o' clothes" with boots and cap and shirt and collar and necktie to match. I having earned them by sawing and cording wood at three shillings a cord. How often we looked back to those better days! The clothes had been too big for me and I had had to wait until my growth had taken up the "slack" in my coat and trousers before I could venture out of the neighborhood. I had tried them on every week or so for a long time. Now my stature filled them handsomely and they filled me with a pride and satisfaction which I had never known before.

"Now may the Lord help ye to be careful—awful, terrible careful o' them clothes every minute o' the day," Aunt Deel cautioned as she looked at me. "Don't git no horse sweat nor wagon grease on 'em."

Barton gets new inspiration from the words of the great Silas Wright, who plans for the education of the boy when he is old enough to leave home for school.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Terrible Ordeal!

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Prophets are often without honor, but seldom without competition.

Weekly Health Talks

Where Most Sickness Begins and Ends

BY FRANKLIN DUANE, M. D.

It can be said broadly that most human life begins in the stomach and ends in the stomach. Good digestion means good health, and poor digestion means bad health. The minute your stomach fails to properly dispose of the food you eat, troubles begin to crop out in various forms. Indigestion and dyspepsia are the commonest forms, but thin, impure blood, headaches, backaches, pimples, blotches, dizziness, belching, coated tongue, weakness, poor appetite, sleeplessness, coughs, colds and bronchitis are almost as common. There is but one way to have good health, and that is to put and keep your stomach in good order. This is easy to do if you take Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. It is a wonderful tonic and blood purifier, and is so safe to take, for it is made of roots and herbs. Dr. Pierce, of Buffalo, N. Y., stands behind this standard medicine, and it is good to know that so distinguished a physician is proud to have his name identified with it. When you take Golden Medical Discovery, you are getting the benefit of the experience of a doctor whose reputation goes all around the earth. Still more, you get a temperance medicine that contains not a drop of alcohol or narcotic of any kind. Long ago Dr. Pierce combined certain valuable vegetable ingredients—without the use of alcohol—so that these remedies always have been strictly temperance medicines.

If piles are torturing you, get and use Pierce's Anodyne Pile Ointment. The quick relief it gives is hard to believe until you try it. If constipated Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets should be taken while using Anodyne Pile Ointment. Few indeed are the cases which these splendid remedies will not relieve and usually overcome. They are so good that nearly every drug store has them for sale.